DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 886 JC 970 470

AUTHOR	Sawano, Yukiko
TITLE	Lifelong Learning: An Instrument for Improving School Education in Japan?
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	16p.; In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs; see JC 970 458.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Curriculum Development; *Educational Attitudes; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Lifelong Learning; National Programs; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; *Role of Education; Rote Learning
IDENTIFIERS	*Japan

ABSTRACT

Although Japanese society has long valued and practiced lifelong learning, it has not yet been successful in building an ethic that prizes learning, teaches creativity, and includes everyone. Bureaucratic and legal mechanisms undertaken in Japan to promote lifelong learning have included the establishment of Lifelong Learning Councils, a system for implementing local measures; liaisons and cooperation schemes for municipalities and prefectures; and criteria for delivering and assessing learning programs and needs. Many local governments have also subsidized "model projects" that promote lifelong learning. Despite these fiscal investments, problems of local implementation, coordination between private and public sectors, reorganization of non-formal education, and lack of administration exist. To foster lifelong learning, elementary and secondary curricula have been reformed to emphasize problem-solving and independent thinking skills, as well as cultivate children's individual needs. However, attempts to reduce school hours to help students learn more with their families have largely failed due to double schooling, or participation in cram schools. Though parents disapprove of these schools, intense competition leaves no room for lax attitudes. As a result, behavioral problems such as truancy and bullying have arisen. The ideal educational system would foster a "zest for living" in an atmosphere where children can achieve "peace of mind," working to eliminate borders between formal and non-formal education. Contains 12 references. (YKH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 411 886

Lifelong Learning: An Instrument for Improving School Education in Japan?

Yukiko Sawano

In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. J. Hatton
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

JC 970 470

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Lifelong Learning: An Instrument for Improving School Education in Japan?

by Yukiko Sawano

Japan has long been a society that values and practices lifelong learning. Embedded in the daily fabric of Japanese life, lifelong learning has become institutionalized and bureaucratized. This paper argues that, in spite of this emphasis, lifelong learning has not been successful in so far as building a learning ethic, one that prizes learning, teaches creativity, includes everyone, and is seamless. This paper describes the current state of lifelong learning in Japan, and discusses the division between non-formal (social) education and formal schooling, problems associated with the latter, and the potential for a revitalized system of learning. In this new vision for learning, the school, the home, and the community come together as one, not as cooperants with divided areas of responsibility, but rather as a single, harmonious unit.

INTRODUCTION

In order to construct a rich, active and participative society within Japan for the 21st century, it is important to build and develop a lifelong learning society — one where "people can learn at any time in their life stage by freely choosing [from among] the learning opportunities ...." (Monbusho, 1996, p.2).

Since the late 1980's, the term "lifelong learning" (shogai-gakushu, in Japanese) has become increasingly celebrated among citizens in Japan. The expression can be heard and read, quite easily, everyday. In local papers, in government publications, and in commercial journals, lifelong learning and discussions related to it are explored in detail. According to a recent public opinion survey on lifelong learning conducted by the Prime Minister's Office, participation in learning programs of various kinds has increased from 40% in 1990 to 48% in 1992 (figures rounded to the nearest whole number) (Monbusho, 1996, p.10).

Discussions regarding lifelong learning are often quite broad in nature; however, the perspective most closely associated with the term tends to reflect a somewhat narrow, leisure-oriented view. For many Japanese, lifelong learning relates only to those specific activities undertaken for pleasure, mainly by housewives and retired people. In fact, this leisure perspective is borne out in practice as many more adult learners in Japan take courses related to personal health and sports, such as exercise, nutrition, jogging, and swimming, and to hobbies such as music, art, flower arranging, dance, and calligraphy, as compared with courses specific to acquiring

professional knowledge and skills as these relate to vocational training (Monbusho, 1996, p. 11).

For some time the Government of Japan has been making extensive efforts to promote a broader and more inclusive picture of lifelong learning within the society, but this struggle has had little success, or at least not as much as had been hoped. The goal of creating a lifelong learning society remains just that, a picture of what could be, rather than what is. Further, the transformation of Japanese society as proposed by the National Council on Educational Reform, an ad hoc organization established as an advisory committee to the Prime Minister from 1984 to 1987, has not yet been fully realized. The goals of this committee included the following:

- recasting the diploma-oriented society (gakureki shakai), where too much emphasis is placed on elementary and secondary school education, and especially on preparatory courses for entrance examinations to upper secondary schools and higher education institutions, into a community where learning at each stage is assessed appropriately;
- providing citizens with a broad range of learning opportunities that respond to the growing demand for the type of education which enriches minds and fulfils lives, a demand that is emerging in concert with higher incomes, increased leisure time, aging and the overall maturation of Japanese society;
- facilitating opportunities for all citizens in Japan to continue learning throughout the lifespan in order to cope with the social, economic and technological changes taking place, including the substantially increased use of higher technology, the explosive growth in information, internationalization, and structural changes taking place in business and industry as these affect society generally.

These same goals have recently been reiterated in the latest White Paper from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan, a document which brings a new urgency to the context with a special section titled "Tasks and Prospects of Lifelong Learning — Increasing Diversity and Level of Knowledge" (Monbusho, 1996).

In the next few pages, this paper describes how mechanisms to disseminate and promote the concept of lifelong learning and to foster the transition of Japan to a lifelong learning society have been established at national and local levels in recent years. It also reflects on the problems which are emerging at this time from the introduction of lifelong learning policies. The paper then turns its focus to elementary and secondary school education, the precursor and a necessary foundation for lifelong learning. It identifies issues specific to elementary and secondary school education in Japan, and discusses how educational qualities and themes associated with lifelong learning policies and philosophy may be effectively used as tools for overcoming some of the negative phenomena associated with school education in Japan. Finally, the paper examines the future for lifelong learning policies, with a specific view towards considering how a lifelong learning ethos could be used to overcome problems associated with elementary and secondary school education in Japan.

The Japanese experience with lifelong learning can be a useful tool for other Asia Pacific economies as they develop and implement broad lifelong learning policies, programs and practices. Of most value will be the Japanese experience with excessive competition in the early learning environment, and what can be done, or avoided, to counter this problem through the use of lifelong learning.

BUREAUCRATIC AND LEGAL MECHANISMS TO PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING

In June 1990, the Japanese government enacted a law for the "Development of Mechanisms and Measures for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning" (abbreviated as the "Law for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning"). This legislation identified systems and projects to be implemented at the national and prefecture level which would promote lifelong learning. Specifically, the law prescribed:

- the establishment of Lifelong Learning Councils, at national and prefecture levels, to be comprised of specialists from various fields including the private sector;
- a system for planning, developing and implementing local measures to promote lifelong learning;
- lifelong learning liaison and cooperation schemes for municipalities and prefectures;
- criteria to be used for projects that would deliver learning programs, and surveys to be used for assessing the learning demands and needs of residents at the prefecture level.

In accordance with this new law, the National Council for Lifelong Learning was established in 1990 within the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. The Council is charged with facilitating and implementing the new national policies for lifelong learning, and since its beginning a priority has been the establishment of Lifelong Learning Councils. Since that time approximately 85% of the prefectures have established planning systems to coordinate lifelong learning linkages with activities taking place between Prefectural Boards of Education and other local public departments, and as of 1995, 65% of the prefectures had established Lifelong Learning Councils (Monbusho, 1996, p.3). In addition to this, nearly 60% of the municipalities have developed systems which actively promote lifelong learning through a variety of activities including Lifelong Learning Promotion Conferences. The law, bureaucratic in nature though it is, has resulted in a well developed set of strategies for promoting, supporting and programming lifelong learning activities.

National Subsidy for Promoting Lifelong Learning

Recently, the National Government, through the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, has been encouraging local governments to implement additional measures which promote lifelong learning. This has been done through the use of subsidies for various "model projects" which are implemented within the prefectures and municipalities. Following are a few examples of model projects which

have attracted subsidies. The variety is notable.

Social Education Leaders

This project identifies and qualifies personnel who have rich educational backgrounds to act as instructors for non-formal education (known as social education in Japan) targeted at youth, women, senior citizens and others. Similar activities have been in place since as early as 1972, but these have been subsumed under the lifelong learning project beginning in 1989.

Promoting Volunteer Activities

According to a 1992 report from the National Lifelong Learning Council, voluntary activities are themselves lifelong learning experiences which facilitate personal development and growth for the volunteer and for others in the community. As a result, the Ministry funded this project with the intention of developing a "volunteer environment" within each community, the goal being to create a climate where persons share their experiences and expertise as community volunteers through a variety of activities at the prefecture level. Included for funding are liaison and coordination of volunteer activities in the prefecture, identification of places for voluntary activities to take place, provision of volunteer information and consultation, development of curriculum for the training of volunteers, training of volunteers, and the establishment of Lifelong Learning Volunteer Centres.

Community Circle Activities

This program was started by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture in 1992. It subsidizes children's "circle activities". These take place during school holidays, typically in neighbouring communities. Circle activities are designed to develop in younger children an eagerness for learning, and an ability to identify problems and search for creative and innovative solutions. It is thought that these activities will develop a lifelong interest in learning during a critical stage of development. The National Lifelong Learning Council considers it particularly important to enrich out-of-school activities for youth in order to promote lifelong learning.

Promoting Women's Lifelong Learning

In Japan, it is considered to be very important to build a society where women have the opportunity to participate fully. This requires changing the traditional stereotypes where there has been, and continues to be, a high degree of role separation, and developing a climate where women feel comfortable and welcome to participate in any field. In order to build this more inclusive society, the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture has been facilitating the participation of women in a wide variety of activities according to ability and interests.

Wide Area Project

This is a component part of the broader Local Lifelong Learning Promotion Project, and has as its key aim the promotion of activities that develop a wide, perhaps even global, geographic perspective among the community. Issues and themes of particular interest which may be supported through this project include the maintenance of global ecology, trends in the consumer movement, and international relations.

School Extension Courses

This project opens the doors of the upper secondary schools and the professional training colleges to the people in the community, thereby providing them with opportunities to learn specialized occupational skills and study liberal arts disciplines. The project also encourages these schools and colleges to include current issues, such as aging and AIDS, in many of the courses they offer.

Recurrent Education Promotion

One of the high priority areas for the development of lifelong learning activities is the promotion and implementation of recurrent training and education programs for workers. The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture has, therefore, created this experimental project to promote systematic and continuing recurrent education that deals expressly with the needs of workers and industry in each community. This program relies on the use of teaching and research facilities at local universities and colleges.

Developing Lifelong Learning Information Systems

This project followed from the Second Report on Educational Reform which was issued in 1986 by the National Council of Educational Reform. The aim of the project is to encourage every prefecture to collect information and develop a computerized data base describing the various lifelong learning activities offered within the district. The data is then shared with the municipalities and its residents in order to encourage greater and more selective participation in lifelong learning activities. By the end of fiscal 1997, all prefectures in Japan will have developed a lifelong learning information system.

In the fiscal year 1995 the national subsidy for these activities and others that fell within the "Local Lifelong Learning Promotion Subsidy" program totalled in excess of $4 billion U.S. (Somucho, 1996). Relative to other economies, this is a substantial investment in a nationally structured, locally implemented, and highly systematic plan to support lifelong learning.

Difficulties with Lifelong Learning Promotion Program

Although there has been a large fiscal investment in lifelong learning within Japan, there have and continue to be a number of problems which have been identified

with the structure and the implementation of the programming. According to a 1995 survey on lifelong learning, conducted by the Administrative Inspection Bureau of the Management and Coordination Agency of Japan, there is a broad need to promote lifelong learning policies more systematically and comprehensively within the society (Somucho, 1996).

The Bureau identified specific problems including the fact that local public authorities are often not very eager when it comes to implementing measures which promote lifelong learning (see Somucho, 1996, pp. 6-7). Also, coordination between the public and private sectors when conducting lifelong learning projects is lacking. A third problem relates to the length of time it has taken to reorganize non-formal education and place it into the lifelong learning system context. The fourth problem is that the administration and management of various projects to promote lifelong learning are often incomplete and not comprehensive enough. A fifth problem relates to the fact that the national subsidy is not effective in so far as guiding local authorities as they attempt to promote lifelong learning.

When specific cases are examined, the root cause of many of the problems appears to be related to the very centralized, top-down administration and budgetary system. Local governments are quite typically eager to get whatever funding might be available, often with little regard to the actual feasibility of implementing the related projects. As a consequence, outcomes are often minimal, little more than paper requirements. Meaningful content is lacking, as are uniform measures, and similar programs designed to promote lifelong learning are implemented in radically different manners in different localities across Japan.

As one example, most of the prefectures in Japan are now offering training courses and workshops for volunteers, and creating data banks that list the human resources available to act as volunteer instructors for various lifelong learning activities. However, the volunteers are now complaining that, although they are trained and willing, no one asks them to actually lead or teach any programming. In effect, they don't have any opportunities to put their training into action. Another example relates to the actual databases in certain prefectures. Because data are not systematically recorded, and often not updated, it takes too long to retrieve correct and useful information. In fact, there are some cases where usable information is simply not available at all, though data banks may exist. Clearly, these examples not only don't respond to the needs of the citizens, they may actually frustrate interest in lifelong learning activities.

From personal observations made during recent study visits to various municipalities within Japan, and interviews with officials in those jurisdictions, I have concluded that it is not the amount of money allocated to a program which determines success. In fact, it is the degree of creativity, flexibility and commitment brought to the project by the relevant administrators. Also particularly important for program success is the level of participation of residents in the process when planning, implementing and managing lifelong learning at local levels.

SCHOOL CURRICULUM REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

In parallel with the national policies designed to move Japan towards a lifelong learning society, elementary and secondary school curricula were modified in order to incorporate lifelong learning principles and theories (Monbusho, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c). It is thought that, whereas in the past school education and lifelong learning were two independent activities, they must in fact be made one in order for both to be successful. Revised courses of study were issued in 1989, and these went into effect in elementary schools in April 1992, in lower secondary schools in April 1993, and in upper secondary schools in April 1994. The content in the courses of study incorporated specific themes and goals, as illustrated per the following précis, the purpose being to prepare citizens who will thrive in the 21st century. Though these statements of content are quite broad in nature, they are implemented through specific curriculum delivery strategies.

Cultivation of well-rounded personalities

In order to encourage the development of young people who possess richness of heart and strength of mind, every aspect of educational activities at all levels should take into account the children's levels of development within the context of the respective subjects.

Emphasize basics and the individual traits of pupils

To place more emphasis on the essential knowledge and skills which are required of every citizen in the nation, and to strengthen educational programs which will enable every child to give full play to his or her individuality, curriculum consistency at all school levels, from kindergarten to upper secondary, and for each subject, is imperative.

Cultivate competency for independent learning

To attach more importance to the nurturing of children's capacity to cope in a positive manner with changes taking place in society, as well as to provide a sound base for fostering children's creativity, the ability and willingness for children to learn independently must be emphasized.

Appreciate Japanese culture and promote international understanding

To put more value on developing in children an attitude of respect for Japanese culture and traditions, as well as increase their understanding of the cultures and histories of other countries, all children should develop the qualities exhibited by Japanese who live within the international community.

In short, the revised courses of study emphasize the importance of developing within children the nature and capacity to survive in a rapidly changing society and enable them with key skills that include problem solving and independent thinking, rather than merely providing rote learning around pre-existing knowledge and

skills. The development of the desire to learn independently, and to not only cope with change but also to embrace it, is fundamental for lifelong learners. Children must shift their views on learning from the "must" perspective to the "wanting" perspective.

Modifications to the Educational Environment

Changes in the actual learning environment have been part and parcel of the implementation of the new course of study. Specifically, team teaching in public elementary and lower secondary schools has been introduced, multipurpose space to be used for a variety of learning activities has been established, increased use of computers and computer-based instruction has been added, more developed libraries are in place, and, broadly speaking, content and pedagogy which cultivate children's individual natures and needs have been developed and implemented.

At the same time, there has been a growing awareness of the need for children, particularly young children, to experience life and develop and mature through contact with their families, other human beings, their communities, and the natural world. Given the five and a half day school week in Japan, this has been difficult. But, concern over the fact that Japanese children have been experiencing less playtime and less time in the natural environment than ever before has been unabated. With this in mind, it was decided to increase the time available for children to spend with their families by implementing, since September 1992, a five day school week in Japan once a month. Previous to that, students attended school every Saturday morning. In April 1995 this was taken one step further, and students no longer attend school on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month.

The move to fewer hours per week spent in formal schooling reflects a major change in Japanese education. The goal is to support the development of learning outside the formal school system by providing families with more time to spend together.

Double Schooling

In spite of the move to fewer hours of formal schooling, the results have not been as hoped or expected. In fact, the consequences of fewer hours per week spent in class has, for many students, been a negative experience, as participation in cram schools (juku in Japanese) and private lessons has filled the gap.

According to a 1993 survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 24% of elementary school pupils and 36% of lower secondary school pupils attend private cram schools (Monbusho, 1994b). These students do so in order to supplement their regular schooling in an effort to prepare for entrance examinations. These examinations are often required for entry into the next level of schooling. Compared to a survey conducted eight years earlier, participation in cram schools by elementary students has increased by 7%, while participation by lower secondary schools has increased by 10%.

In addition to the Juku, many students in Japan enrol in a variety of private lessons. Recent surveys document (see Monbusho, 1994b) that 77% of elementary school pupils and 28% of lower secondary school pupils take lessons in such fields

as calligraphy, abacus, music, dance, art, foreign languages and sports. These numbers also increased, though less dramatically than participation in Juku, during the past decade. A small number of elementary school students and 5% of the lower secondary school pupils are learning at home with tutors, and 12% of elementary school pupils and 12% of lower secondary school pupils are taking interactive correspondent learning courses at home.

Altogether, 84% of elementary school pupils and 78% of lower secondary school pupils participate in at least one out-of-school learning program (Monbusho, 1994b). For girls, the participation rate in private lessons and correspondence courses is highest, while for boys it is the cram schools. As the children get older, the purpose of cram school attendance changes from preparation and review of school lessons to preparation for entrance examinations.

These same data show that there is a link between parental expectations and attendance at cram schools, and this link appears to be getting stronger (Monbusho, 1994b). Parents who want their children to attend higher education are more likely to enrol them in cram schools, and the "higher" or more "elite" the school, the more likely is attendance at a cram school. In 1985, 34% of the parents who wanted their children to attend universities, or in some cases graduate schools, enroled their children in cram schools. By 1990 this had increased to 43%. By way of comparison, in 1985, 26% of parents who wanted their children to attend a junior college or professional school enroled their children in cram schools. In 1990 this figure had risen to 33%.

Regardless of attendance at cram schools, 61% of parents think there is too much emphasis placed on the use of these schools, and that cram school attendance can and does create a number of problems. The following have been described by parents as concerns, with the number in brackets representing the percentage of respondents (parents) who agreed with the particular concern (Monbusho, 1994b):

- in cram schools there is excessive competition in the form of entrance examinations and this has a negative influence on the development of children (58%);
- children who attend cram schools miss other important experiences related to play, community activities, and general living (52%);
- attendance at cram schools for long hours is bad for the health and physical strength of children (48%);
- career guidance in cram schools puts too much emphasis on children's grades, standard deviations and other hard data, while ignoring aptitude and the will to learn (45%);
- attendance at cram schools creates excessive financial burdens for parents (38%);
- in cram schools the priority is on "studying", while "learning" and school education tend to be cast in a negative light (34%);
- cram schools do not develop within children an interest in learning or the ability to learn on one's own initiative, and thinking skills do not develop (26%);

- children feel uneasy and are confused by the instruction given in cram schools because it is substantively different from that given in regular schools (10.8%).

Regardless of any other considerations, seeing children return home from cram schools at 10 p.m., or even as late as 11 p.m., does not leave a healthy impression.

Behavioural Problems Among School Children

In addition to the problems associated with the keen desire that Japanese exhibit for additional schooling, other problems, including truancy and bullying behaviour, have become increasingly common. The current school system is simply not meeting the needs of many Japanese students, and others are either not attending of their own volition or are being denied entry by the system.

According to a 1993 "School Basic Survey" completed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, an increasing number of elementary and secondary school students were absent from school for more than 30 days for "economic reasons" (Monbusho, 1994a). As well, the number of students who refused to attend on the basis of the simple fact they "dislike ... schools" is also increasing. In 1994, approximately 71,000 elementary school students and approximately 113,000 lower secondary school students were absent from schools for long time periods, and of these, approximately 22% of the elementary school students and 54% of the secondary school students were non-attenders because they "dislike schools" (Monbusho, 1995a). Though the percentage of students who refuse to attend school is relatively small – 0.18% at the elementary level and 1.32 % at the lower secondary level – the actual number of youth affected is quite meaningful.

In addition to the problem of non-attendance, bullying at schools has become a problem. According to Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture data, 11% of elementary school students and 19% of lower secondary school students have identified bullying and fighting as a problem within the school system (Monbusho, 1995a). This has been and continues to be a key factor when students identify causes at the root of negative feelings related to schooling.

Surprising to some observers, but assumed in Japan, is the custom of treating students who refuse to participate in regular compulsory education as having attended. In this way they actually graduate as if the system had served their needs and they it. In fact, there are non-attenders who, although they are technically on school grounds, spend their entire time in the nurse's room. Others who refuse to attend regular school spend their time in psychological counselling or participating in alternative "free schools." These students are not always captured in official data; however, it is increasingly clear that they complete their education, at least on paper, without ever receiving the benefits of full access to in-school learning opportunities.

A MODEL FOR THE NATION'S EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In July 1996, the Central Council for Education, which is an advisory body to the Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, issued a report entitled "A Model for the Nation's Education in the 21st Century" (Chukyoshin, 1996). The report

focused on two key phrases for the reform of education in Japan: "zest for living" and "peace of mind".

The Council argues in the report that in order to overcome the problems noted earlier, as well as others, the school system needs to provide children with the strength to survive in a rapidly changing society. This strength will come through, so the Council believes, cultivating a "zest for living" in children in a relaxed atmosphere where all can keep their "peace of mind".

The Council has described "zest for living" as a broadly inclusive term, encapsulating the following:

- the abilities and qualities to identify problems for oneself, to learn and think for oneself, to make judgements and act independently, and to seek and find better ways of solving problems as they arise;
- a pliant sensitivity that can be moved by beautiful things and the wonders of nature, a spirit that emphasizes justice and fairness and is impressed by acts of rightness while abhorring erroneous behaviour, a spirit that values life and has respect for human rights, and a warm heart that is filled with gentleness and consideration for others, is able to think from the perspective of others and is able to sympathize with them;
- a healthy body and the stamina needed to live a vigorous and active life.

"Zest for living" is considered by the Council to be a fundamental competency of lifelong learning. They argue that it is an indispensable element in creative activity and for opening up new frontiers in the context of increasing internationalization and the growth of an information-intensive society. The report points out that in order to cultivate a "zest for living", it is important that home, school and community work together, in partnership, and keep a balance in their shared commitment to education. It also declares an ambition to enlarge the opportunity for children to experience life and nature. In all of this it is assumed that in-school education must strongly emphasize the cultivation of "zest for living".

Curriculum reform focusing on these new directions has already begun, and from a structural perspective, the five day school week is expected to be fully implemented early in the 21st century. Equally important, however, is the ongoing need to re-develop curriculum content and teaching methods. A slimmer curriculum is a key goal. To facilitate this curriculum revision, it will be necessary to create a closer relationship between schools and the local communities, and to increase the educational role and mandate of the community. The business sector and labour unions are also trying to transform the work place so that parents, and especially fathers, will have more time to participate in caring for and educating their children not only at home but also through school and community activities.

Structure of Partnerships in Education

The ideal partnership between school and non-formal education in Japan has, until recently, been symbolised in a key phrase: "gaku-sha renkei". This implies that the

functions of school education and those of social education should be complementary, each demonstrating its own educational utility, and with a high degree of cooperation between the two. More recently, there has been a discussion among the policy-makers to move from "cooperation" to "fusion" or "harmony" (yugo). This implies doing away with barriers that exist between schools and social education facilities, as well as with the local community. All resources, and especially human resources, would be embraced in order to improve the quality of education and learning and meet the lifelong learning needs of everyone in the society.

One of the key mechanisms to harmonize the school, home and community which has been recommended in the National Council of Lifelong Learning's latest report, is through the use of lay human resources (Shogaishin, 1996). By involving community personnel in various education activities, harmony can be achieved. Recently, and in order to allow and encourage those people with specialized knowledge and skills from outside the school to participate directly within the educational arena, a formal "Special Arrangement for Part-time Teachers Without Teaching Certificates" was established. Although still quite new, in 1994 there were a total of 2,328 people teaching through this arrangement, most of them in upper secondary schools (Shogaishin, 1996). Advantages associated with the use of lay teachers, or those without formal teaching qualifications, is the diversity they foster in terms of educational context and content. Individuality is also nurtured, and there are advantages in terms of career guidance, since students get a better first hand understanding of various occupations.

In many prefectures and municipalities, citizens have assumed various roles as instructors in and out of the formal school setting. For example, in Iizuka-shi of Fukuoka prefecture, the Iizuka-shi Board of Education recruits volunteers from the Senior Citizen's University and the Senior Citizen's Graduate School, placing them in elementary and lower secondary schools where there is demand from the schools. The volunteers provide support in a variety of instructional areas, including sports and recreation, as well as crafts, calligraphy and drawing.

In another example, schools in Ichikawa-shi of Chiba prefecture invite well-educated citizens, and social education specialists in particular, to act as community instructors. These community members provide support for specialized courses in disciplines such as environmental studies, social studies, and science, and they host various club activities. They also work to open school facilities to the community, conduct extension courses, and organize camping and hiking outings which help "fuse" the school, home and community into one. In each community there are special committees at the city level for overall planning, and each school has a Community School Committee composed of teachers, other school staff, and representatives from the Parent Teachers Association.

Within Japan, these practices are quite innovative. In order to develop and expand the framework and the programming, as well as stay true to the values and philosophy of this initiative, it will be necessary to avoid dividing the roles of the school, the home and the community. Instead, the three must work together in harmony or fusion. In this regard, a system of vertical administration should be considered. It would also be valuable if all citizens have the potential to participate in the

decision making process for the planning of education in and out of school, and in the actual process of education and learning. To flourish, the process as it relates to both the school and the community should be transparent so that all the stakeholders are aware of the problems and become part of the solution.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Prime Minister of Japan, Ryutaro Hashimoto, stated in his policy speech at the opening of the Diet's regular session on January 20, 1997, that he will encourage school reforms from the point of view of emphasizing lifelong learning (Hashimoto, 1997a, 1997b). Increased importance will be placed on developing diverse competencies, including creativity and critical thinking, and challenging individuals to become the best they can, rather than, as in the past, emphasizing equality and uniformity. The government is prepared to allocate greater budget support for the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities in order for all Japanese citizens to achieve and enjoy an active, happy and meaningful life.

Regardless of government support, there are many problems within the current educational system and attempts to modify that system have not enjoyed universal success. The top heavy bureaucracy has been particularly ineffective. Change may not come quickly, however, some lessons have been learned. For example, it is necessary to review, and where necessary fully redevelop, traditional value systems and expectations related to teaching and learning and to develop a more flexible administrative and management style.

The current move in Japan to merge the formal school system with the non-formal system, and to create one learning system where the school, the home and the community work together, is a major shift in direction. Coupled with this is a move to a leaner, formal curriculum, the use of more lay teachers and instructors, and emphasis placed on learning to learn and learning for the sake of learning. Taken together, these suggest a very different learning system in Japan, one where the borders in education fall, and learning becomes seamless, enjoyable and lifelong.

REFERENCES

Chukyoshin. (1996). *First report of 15th session of the Central Council for Education: A model for the nation's education in the 21st Century — Zest for living and peace of mind*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Monbusho.

Hashimoto, R. (1997a). http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/970120shisei.html

Hashimoto, R. (1997b). http://www.mofa.go.jp/f_m/hashimoto/140session.html

Monbusho. (1996). *Japanese Government policies in education, science and culture 1996: Tasks and prospects for a lifelong learning society*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Monbusho. (1995a). Statistical abstract of education, science and culture, 1995. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Monbusho. (1994a). *Japanese Government policies in education, science and culture 1994: New directions in school education — fostering strength of life*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Monbusho. (1994b). *Report on the survey of cram schools*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Monbusho. (1989a). *The course of study for elementary school*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Monbusho. (1989b). *The course of study for lower secondary school*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Monbusho. (1989c). *The course of study for upper secondary school*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Author.

Shogaishin. (1996, April). *National council of lifelong learning: Report on the measures to enrich lifelong learning opportunities in the community*. [Translation]. Tokyo: Monbusho.

Somucho. (1996). *Survey on the promotion of lifelong learning for fiscal 1995, 445*. Tokyo: Author.